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TAGS: PREL PGOV BE CG  
SUBJECT: A FEW EUROPEAN SECURITY MISFIRES

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Roger Meece. Reason 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (SBU) A couple of misfires from Brussels regarding DRC security issues underscores the considerable political maneuvering going on relative to the DRC's post-Transition future. The first issue appears to reflect internal Belgian lapses, as newspaper articles confirmed by Kinshasa diplomats report that Belgian Defense Minister Flahaut offered DRC President Kabila an honorary doctorate at the Belgian Royal Military College during a visit to the DRC last week. Flahaut announced February 23 in Kinshasa that Kabila would receive the diploma in a forthcoming visit to Belgium.

¶2. (C) According to international press reports, Belgian FM De Gucht was "very unhappy" with this initiative, along with PM Verhofstadt. An MFA spokesperson was quoted as saying that such use of the Royal Military College "for political purposes is not appropriate." Verhofstadt was reported as feeling the move was "premature" and of having "reversed" the Flahaut commitment. The Associated Press reported Kabila advisor Marcellin Chisambo as saying that Kabila was "not shocked, but(uncomfortable to be each time the object of quarrels between Belgian politicians." Chisambo told the Ambassador February 27 that Kabila asked Chisambo to explain what was going on in Belgian politics. Chisambo said that despite many years resident in Belgium, he did not understand, and said as much to Kabila.

¶3. (C) Possibly related, according to several European diplomats, Flahaut also caused a stir with a Belgian government plan to initiate an "audit" of two or more of the FARDC integrated brigades, apparently with a view to determining future needs of those brigades. This provoked concerns that the bilateral effort ran the risk of conflict with other European initiatives underway, including the European Security Mission (EUSEC) program.

¶4. (C) The Belgian Charge said that Flahaut has recently sent letters to other European defense ministers elaborating on the proposal and inviting the others to participate. The British and French Ambassadors indicated that responses are being prepared in their capitals and have been sent agreeing in principle, but insisting on the exercise being conducted uniquely in a European context in close coordination with EUSEC. The French Ambassador indicated as well that at least one French member of parliament in Kinshasa for the Great Lakes parliamentary group had sought him out to quiz him on the possible conflict between European efforts and the Belgian plan.

¶5. (C) Comment: While both incidents seem to be relatively minor, the rapid and strong political reactions reflect significant sensitivities over the political maneuvering currently going on, particularly within Europe, for positioning in post-election DRC, and most notably in the security sector. The Flahaut university degree gambit may be a function of internal Belgian politics and the early stages of the run-up to June elections. It has created, however, another rather embarrassing situation for the Belgians, and for Kabila, illustrative of always difficult and complicated DRC-Belgian relations. Both of these incidents reflect a strong European desire to be in the driver's seat for future security sector activities in the Congo, and active discussions among European diplomats in Kinshasa reinforce the impression. The Congolese view of all this, as well as the attitudes of the Angolans and South Africans, is less clear. End summary.  
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